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Brucellosis

Cattle Buyers Guide

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CATTLE BUYER'S RECORDS

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Veterinary Services
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Don't Let Brucellosis Spoil Your Investments

Can Be Costly

Whether putting together a new cattle herd or adding to one you already have, you owe it to yourself to avoid "buying" brucellosis. You may know it as Bang's disease or contagious abortion. Whatever it's called, this easily transmitted, bacterial disease can be quite costly.

Once in a herd, brucellosis can spread rapidly, causing cows to abort or to give birth to weak, unthrifty calves. Retained afterbirth can ensue, leading to secondary infections and impaired fertility. This all adds up to reduced calf crops and lost dollars.

In dairy herds, the disruption of normal lactation cycles and *Brucella* infections of the udder can result in substantially reduced milk yields.

Prolonged quarantines and accompanying trade restrictions needed to protect the great majority of herds which are free of disease also can be costly. Meanwhile, owners of infected herds have the expense of repeatedly gathering their animals for testing. Although owners are paid an indemnity, having to send reactors to slaughter and sometimes losing highly valued bloodlines can add to the financial hardships.

Precautions

Brucellosis most often enters a clean herd when a farmer or rancher unwittingly buys infected or exposed animals. You can make your cattle purchases a great deal "safer" by following a few simple guidelines:

- Ask the seller to give you information on the Brucellosis status of the herd or herds of origin of any cattle you buy. Of course, it's best to buy from certified brucellosis-free herds or from sources with a reputation for selling disease-free cattle.
- Buy from herds that haven't added animals within the past 12 months.
- Buy animals that were calfhood vaccinated—as shown by eartags, tattoos, and health certificates.
- Buy cattle that were tested negative for brucellosis within 30 days of purchase.

- Isolate newly purchased cattle. Then, after 45 to 120 days, have them retested before mixing them with your own herd.

One Test Is Not Enough

There's good reason for postpurchase testing. Cattle exposed to brucellosis may have a negative blood test at time of sale, because they are in the incubation stage of infection. In other words, the disease hasn't developed to the point where animals will react to a blood test.

If blood tests do indicate brucellosis, ask your veterinarian and a veterinarian of your State or Federal animal health agency to evaluate the situation. Their advice and assistance can save dollars you may otherwise lose.

Take every precaution to protect your cattle from exposure to brucellosis. Know the health status of other herds in your vicinity. Keep fences mended. Avoid using community pastures if you can. Discuss a vaccination program with your veterinarian. Isolate any animal that aborts or has a retained placenta or a uterine discharge; and call your veterinarian.

Occupational Risk

You should know that brucellosis can be transmitted from animals (cattle and swine especially) to humans. Sometimes called undulant fever, human brucellosis is a debilitating disease. People can contract brucellosis by drinking unpasteurized milk from infected animals.

On farms or ranches, the greatest danger to people comes from contact with placental tissues or uterine discharges from infected animals. To reduce this risk:

- Clean contaminated areas such as calving pens or animal isolation areas.
- Wear protective gloves when assisting at calving or helping to remove a retained placenta, and scrub well afterward.
- Burn or bury aborted fetuses and contaminated placental tissues.
- Clean and disinfect areas where abortions have occurred.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth until you have scrubbed after handling animals—especially newborn—or raw milk or milking equipment.

Personal and area cleanliness is important even where no known diseased animals are present. It also makes sense for farm families to pasteurize the milk they drink at home.

Unlike the disease in animals, human brucellosis is treatable. See a physician promptly if you have symptoms such as intermittent fever, chills, night sweats, body aches, poor appetite, and weakness.

Eradication

Brucellosis can be eradicated from a herd, a county, a State. It has been eradicated from entire nations. Eradication of brucellosis is the national goal of a cooperative State-Federal program. Through your practice of prevention and control, you can help make this goal a reality.

Eradication will spare cattle owners the risk of serious economic losses. Meat and milk consumers will benefit from the greater abundance of wholesome animal protein. Public health will be improved because people only get the disease from animals or animal products.

